NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5594 MARCH 9, 1978
BILL READ/BOSTON

THE BOTTLE BILL

ANNCR:

THE WORRIES OF A MODERN SOCIETY SOMETIMES CENTER ON THE MOST COMMONPLACE OF DAILY ITEMS. A CASE IN POINT -- BOTTLES -- IS THE SUBJECT OF THIS BACKGROUND REPORT BY VOA'S BOSTON CORRESPONDENT BILL READ.

VOICE:

NOT FAR OUTSIDE OF BOSTON IS A SCENIC STRETCH OF HIGHWAY KNOWN AS "BATTLE ROAD." IT'S AN OLD COUNTRY ROAD THAT WINDS THROUGH THE FIELDS AND WOODS THAT SEPARATE LEXINGTON AND CONCORD -- A PAIR OF NEIGHBORING TOWNS WHERE, IT IS SAID, THE FIRST SHOTS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR WERE FIRED.

EACH YEAR THOUSANDS OF TOURISTS, AS WELL AS LOCAL RESIDENTS, TRAVEL ALONG BATTLE ROAD, PAUSING AT TIMES TO READ HISTORIC MARKERS...TO SNAP PICTURES...AND TO PICNIC BENEATH A TREE OR AT A ROADSIDE PARK.

UNFORTUNATELY ALL THESE PEOPLE WHO COME TO "BATTLE ROAD" TOO OFTEN LEAVE BEHIND UNWANTED REMINDERS OF THEIR VISIT... TOO OFTEN THEY LITTER THE ROADSIDE WITH SOFT DRINK BOTTLES, BEER CANS, AND OTHER BEVERAGE CONTAINERS. THE RESULT IS A COSTLY CLEANUP PROBLEM -- A PROBLEM, MOREOVER, NOT JUST ALONG "BATTLE ROAD" BUT IN FACT ALONG MANY HIGHWAYS HERE IN MASSACHUSETTS.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THIS PROBLEM HAS BECOME A LEADING ISSUE BEFORE THE MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE. STATE LAWMAKERS ARE ENGAGED IN A HEATED DEBATE OVER THE MERITS OF A SO-CALLED "BOTTLE BILL." IF ENACTED, IT WOULD REQUIRE THE SALE OF BEER AND SOFT DRINKS IN RETURNABLE BOTTLES AND CANS. THE IDEA IS

A SIMPLE ONE. SO-CALLED "ONE-WAY" CONTAINERS THAT ARE DISCARDED AFTER USE WOULD BE REPLACED BY REUSABLE CONTAINERS. AND TO MAKE SURE THEY WOULD BE RETURNED FOR REUSE A MINIMUM FIVE-CENT DEPOSIT WOULD BE IMPOSED ON EACH BOTTLE AND CAN. PRESUMABLY SCAVENGERS, IF NO ONE ELSE, WOULD HAVE ENOUGH ECONOMIC INCENTIVE TO RETURN EMPTY CONTAINERS TO FOOD AND LIQUOR STORES FOR THE FIVE-CENT REBATE.

THOSE WHO FAVOR THE "BOTTLE BILL" SAY THAT SIMILAR LEGISLATION HAS WORKED WELL IN TWO OTHER STATES. AND, SAY THE BACKERS, THE REUSE OF CONTAINERS HAS THE ADDED BENEFIT OF SAVING MATERIALS AND ENERGY NEEDED TO MAKE NEW BOTTLES.

WHILE ALL THIS MAY SOUND VERY SENSIBLE, THE PROSPECTS FOR PASSAGE OF THE BOTTLE BILL ARE FAR FROM CERTAIN. WHILE REDUCTION OF LITTER IS DESIRED BY EVERY MEMBER OF THE MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE, SOME OF THE LAWMAKERS OPPOSE THE BILL BECAUSE IT WOULD DAMAGE THE BOTTLE-MAKING INDUSTRY. AN ESTIMATED TWO THOUSAND JOBS WOULD BE LOST IN A STATE THAT STILL SUFFERS THE EFFECTS OF A HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE.

WITH JOBS A PRIORITY POLITICAL CONCERN HERE IN MASSACHUSETTS, THE LAWMAKERS ARE CAUGHT BETWEEN CONFLICTING INTERESTS... INTERESTS MADE NONE THE EASIER BY HEAVY -- SOME SAY, UNPRECEDENTED -- LOBBYING BY ENVIRONMENTALISTS WHO SUPPORT THE BILL, AND THE BOTTLE INDUSTRY WHICH IS AGAINST IT.

WHILE THE OUTCOME STILL IS IN DOUBT, THE CONTROVERSY HAS TAKEN ON NATIONAL OVERTONES. AS ANYONE WHO HAS EVER TRAVELED ACROSS THE UNITED STATES KNOWS, ROADSIDE LITTER IS HARDLY A PROBLEM ONLY HERE IN MASSACHUSETTS. SO FAR, HOWEVER, ONLY TWO THINLY POPULATED AND LARGELY RURAL STATES -- VERMONT AND OREGON -- HAVE PASSED BOTTLE BILLS. NO INDUSTRIAL STATE, WHERE THE JOBS STAKES CAN BE HIGH, HAS ACTED. MASSACHUSETTS --

A HEAVILY POPULATED, INDUSTRIAL STATE -- CAN THEREFORE SET A PRECEDENT ... PERHAPS A PATTERN ... FOR HOW TO HANDLE THE PROBLEM OF BOTTLES AND CANS THAT LITTER AMERICA'S HIGHWAYS.

JS/PY